DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 874 JC 960 641

AUTHOR Wattenbarger, James L.
TITLE The Responsibilities of an Autonomous Community College District Board of Trustees.
PUB DATE Sep 96
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Florida State Board of Community Colleges' Annual Trustee Workshop (Orlando, FL, September 9-10, 1996).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; *College Planning; Community Colleges; Educational Policy; *Educational Principles; *Governing Boards; Policy Formation; *Statewide Planning; *Trustees; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Flordia Community College System; *Trustee Role

ABSTRACT

The 28 Florida community colleges have made significant accomplishments in the areas of removing barriers to education, student outcomes, curriculum development, and financial support for students. These accomplishments have resulted from the state's Master Plan for community colleges developed from 1955 to 1957 under legislation that established the state's Community College Council. In the developing the plan, the Council worked on the following four basic assumptions: education is necessary for democratic government; education is valuable for the improvement of society; education is valuable because it helps to equalize opportunity for all people; and education must be locally controlled oriented to be truly democratic and to achieve greatest success. Based on these assumptions, the colleges' development was guided by commitments to local control and policy-making, to maintain open access, to maintain student costs as low as possible, and to provide programs that students need. Since local control is emphasized in the system, it is essential that boards of trustees understand their responsibilities. The most important decision a Board will make is the selection of the chief executive officer, while it is important in the process that the Board determines institutional needs, appropriate leadership, and a reasonable budget. Other responsibilities include the supervision of planning, maintaining communication with the State Board, setting policies related to college personnel, and establishing relationships with local citizens and agencies. (HAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 400 874

The Responsibilities of an Autonomous Community College District Board of Trustees

By

James L. Wattenbarger

Paper presented at the Florida State Board of Community Colleges' Annual Trustee Workshop (Orlando, FL, September 9-10, 1996).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J.L. Wattenbarger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

JC 960 641

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

JAMES L. WATTENBARGER

(please note that this paper is not documented as to sources)

What are the accomplishments of Florida's 28?

Relative to the barriers:

Financial--Low tuition but great pressure to increase student fees.

Access--28 college districts, colleges within commuting distance of 99% of the state's population. Campuses and centers extend the opportunity. Opportunity available to over a million people each year.

Diversity of Programs--AA degree provides both for the students who wish to transfer and to those who are looking for a job. (for example, Dr. Bruce Judd in his award winning dissertation found that the major portion of those who work in local government positions in the cities and counties of Florida are AA degree graduates of our community colleges). Many technical and business related fields major source for Nurses, Dental Hygienists and Assistants as well as other health-related fields, very many in remedial or developmental education

Relative to State-wide Planning

28 colleges designed to provide for the 28 districts

Physical facilities in every district, while not perfect, do represent a respectable accumulation of facilities for teaching and other activities.

Cooperative use of facilities in a number of locations

Constant contact with communities to assess community needs

Continuous evaluation of operations, including curriculum, outcomes, efficiency, quality

Sensitivity to public school systems and to university system

Curriculum in Prep-Tech area

Attention by state legislature to "accountability"

Relative to Students

Profile: average age 29+

more women than men

more part-time than full-time

increasingly diverse, percentages approach population diversity

more older students

more needing remedial opportunities

seeking job training for the local communities

more students with degrees coming back for further training

Relative to curriculum

Sound general education programs required for the AA degree

Excellent record of university work for most transfer students indicating sound preparation for upper division

Great diversity of technical and other occupationally oriented programs

Great impact of continuing education for older students

Development of work-study arrangements

Relative to communities

Impact upon economic development

Impact upon cultural development

Relative to financial support

Fairly good comparative to all of education

Lottery funds were not in addition to general revenue

Student tuition is increasing

Building funds developed with PECO commitments

No local support

Increasing dependence upon Foundation and development activities

What are some of the foreseeable trends?

Open door

financial curtailment could affect the door

indiscriminate testing could affect individuals

concern for literacy could increase concerns for those citizens

Selecting Priorities

financial limits may cause programs to be curtailed or dropped

broader responsibilities brought about by federal legislation

Faculty

in short supply, need 7500 new faculty by 2010

use of part-time reaching questionable levels in relation to quality

use of new teaching technologies, costs and training

Outside decision makers

Legislature, especially staff,

Governor's office, particularly in relation to budget

Other state agencies, increased concern from Welfare and Prisons

Societal trends

Demographics

Aging Population (in 2000 nearly 40 million will be over 65;
only 1 in 10 (60-72) is poor

Diversity (the M classification) (in 2000 one third will be "minority")

Shifts within the state (one quarter of total population of USA live in three states, FL, CA, TX) Single person households are the fastest growing.

Economics

Shift from industrial to service and information (high technology)

Part-time workers now make up one fourth of the workforce

High school graduates now earn 25% less than their counterparts did 15 years ago

Competition is now increasingly global

Thirty million people now work at home at least 8 hours per week

Over half of the women (18-44) and who have infants under one year old are in the labor force

Employee satisfaction is generally DOWN

Service sector will grow by 26 million jobs before 2000;

Manufacturing sector will decline by 19.5 million

Gap between richest and poorest is widening

Top ten percent hold 86%; bottom 55% have zero or negative

wealth

Richest 1% have more income than the poorest 40% (2.5 million control 13.5% and 100 million control 12.7%)

Political Climate

Increasing dependence upon polling

National debt continues to rise

Strong objection to "taxing" even by those who pay very little

Lifestyles

babies born with drug addiction

one quarter of preschool children are poor

dropout rate from high school in some urban areas equals 50%

80% of the crimes are committed by ages 15-29

Homicide by firearms is the leading cause of death among the 15-19 year old African American youth; the third leading cause for white youth

One in four households is a single person

First marriages have 50/50 chance of lasting four years; one third of all Americans are now step-something

Single parent families are increasing in numbers, children suffer

More than half of the young adults (18-24) live at home and the number of boomerangs (late twenties) is increasing each year

Number of people who work at home is now about 20% of the workforce (by 2000) Technology makes home a communications center

About 90% of time is spent indoors with television and computers in a Roper poll, 41 % say leisure is more important than work

Technology

geographic location is less important than communication

possibility of genetic engineering

those who are not ready to use technology will be left behind

Education

funding cutbacks have reduced programs
blame for disparities in workforce competition in a global economy have been heaped upon the public schools
new media's relentless highlighting of education inadequacies have reinforced the negative public perceptions
this results in resistance to change which in turn results in outside interference
this results in Saviors called "'privatization" and "choice" and "chartered"
President's recommendation that all students who can should have an opportunity for community college

FLORIDA'S PLAN

These accomplishments have resulted from a PLAN that was developed in the 1955-57 biennium under legislation that established the Community College Council. When the Council began the study that led to the Florida Master Plan for community colleges, we developed some basic assumptions that have guided the development of this plan. Looking back at the research and reports of experience in other states as well as the basic philosophical commitments that have guided the development of community colleges in other parts of the nation, the Council selected these four assumptions as the basis for the development of Florida's community colleges:

1. **Education is necessary for democratic government.** Jefferson, who along with others aided in the early formulation of American ideals and goals, expressed in his writings the need for intelligent citizenship and educated citizens. Continued faith in this ideal of educated citizenry who can control their destiny in a democratic manner has been a motivating factor in the American system of public education. (In fact Jefferson in his correspondence with Pierre Dupont de Nemours recommended that there be a college in every county and that those who merited the opportunity should attend these colleges prior to their enrollment in a national university. He further urged that the state should assist the poorer counties in support of these colleges, a very early financial plan for shared support).

2. **Education is valuable for the improvement of society.** There is evidence on every hand to prove the value of education for the improvement of society. The United States Chamber of Commerce studies of somewhat ancient vintage that compared levels of living with educational attainment in various countries of the world clearly showed that high educational attainment and high levels of living go hand in hand. Certainly the American People in general have expressed faith in the basic correctness of this

assumption. (Just a short time ago a report on the employment policies of business and industry during the past few years pointed out that those companies that provided educational opportunities to employees who were retained when there was a cut-back in the total number of persons employed were the companies that maintained continued success and are now considered to be on a solid basis for success. These companies are now ready to expand their productivity and will even be expanding the numbers of employees once more).

3. **Education is valuable because it helps to equalize opportunity for all people.** Faith in the influence of education as a way of encouraging personal improvement has been continually expressed. The supposition that education is a privilege of an aristocracy was very quickly discarded early in American history. This assumption does not imply that all people should have the same educational experiences, but rather that all should have the same opportunity for education which is adapted to their abilities and their own needs as well as society's needs. (We have moved in this country since 1636 when Harvard was established from limiting the opportunity for higher education to an elite group from the socio-economic leadership of their communities to broadening that opportunity in 1862 through the establishment of land-grant colleges and universities that based opportunity for higher education upon merit, that is opening the doors to those who had demonstrated that their abilities were equal to the requirements of collegiate education. This broadening of opportunity for higher education was followed in the early 1900s by the concept of providing opportunity for all persons, the so-called mass education opportunity that was already guiding the expansion of the American high schools. Since so many persons were unsuccessful in the usual type of collegiate education, the concept was modified to provide higher educational opportunity for each person according to each person's needs and abilities. The community college was developed as based upon this concept).

4. **Education to be truly democratic and to achieve greatest success must be locally controlled and locally oriented.** This assumption has been evidenced in the continued strong support for local school boards and local administration of schools. It has been a foundation stone for the development of the public school system expressed as an integral part of the laws of the states. (It is refreshing and gratifying to note that the current political climate is encouraging the consideration of local decision-making in a number of areas unrelated to community colleges. In fact, the leaders of the universities in our state have often expressed to me their wish to have the same freedom to operate their institutions that the locally controlled community colleges have).

As a result of these assumptions and the subsequent research studies that emerged in the 1950s, several **commitments** emerged to guide the development of this level of higher education. The basic and most important of these was **a strong commitment to local control**. The interim step toward the community college districts that we now have was to use the county boundaries and the local school boards as a

vehicle in getting the new colleges started. The five colleges that were operating in 1957 were parts of the local school systems of the counties in which they were located and this procedure for expansion of this level of higher education required no particular change in the existing structure. It was obvious, however, that some kind of state-level coordination would be needed and a State Board of Community Colleges was established for that purpose. A clear differentiation between the responsibilities of the state-level coordinating board and the local operating board is essential. There is need for the state to establish some floors or minimums in operational decision-making. The local boards of Trustees, however, should not have their ceilings defined so specifically. The operating boards must be responsible for the operational decisions or else they loose their rationale for being. In order to maintain the local autonomy of each institution the Board of Trustees must make responsible decisions and must accept responsibility for the results of their decisions.

A second commitment was the commitment to maintain the "open door". One of the major considerations in establishing community colleges is to provide educational opportunity at the post-high level not only for those persons who have demonstrated success in academic activities but also for those who obviously need a second educational chance. We can all remember persons who did not learn as rapidly as some of us. (A few of these may even be in our own family). We also know that uneducated persons have a difficult time in our modern technological economy. Finally, we know that there is educational progress available for each person. Education is so much more productive than prison and/or welfare. The latter two are often the sole alternatives. The open door requires educational services that each college must provide in accord with the specified needs of the communities that are served by a particular community college. The open door is also a commitment to the total population of the community and the diversity of the community must be represented by those who attend the community college.

A third commitment was to develop colleges with the lowest possible cost to the student. One of the major barriers to higher education has been the financial barrier. The Florida Master Plan located community colleges in all parts of the state, within commuting distance of 99% of the state's population. The mere fact that a community college is available will, of course, cut the financial cost of attending college but there needs to be a continued concern on the part of local Boards of Trustees to keep the cost of attending as low as possible in order to eliminate the financial barrier. This commitment is a major responsibility of the Boards of Trustees. By keeping fees as low as possible and by encouraging the availability of student grants and scholarships, Boards can make major contributions to the availability of educational opportunity to the sons and daughters of their friends and neighbors as well as to all the local citizens.

A fourth commitment is to make certain that the college provides the variety of programs that are needed by the community and the students who attend. If the community college is to serve the educational needs of all its students, there must be a strong program of remedial or corrective education for those who have been crippled in their educational progress. It would be a joyful occasion for all of us to find that all students who graduate from high school had achieved at least a defined minimum level of skill in using the English language and in applying mathematical concepts in their daily life. But then we would have only the problem of those who dropped out of high school without finishing the course of study and/or those who move into our state every day and become permanent residents. And that might be a sizable number. Our community colleges have had a respectable success in this form of rehabilitation and numbers of your local citizens are now contributing to their own as well as to the community's economic benefit as a result of their community college experience. Several research studies have proved the value of these types of programs. (For example, read Bushnell's article in the new VISIONS). Other research has shown that most of the local persons who work in public service jobs in our communities have been graduated from the local community college. These include the clerks in the courthouse, the police, the fire personnel, the hospital teams including nurses as well as other members of these teams and many of the teachers and social service workers who began their professional education in the community college. The impact of the technical programs in the college has affected the socio-economic structure of our communities as well as the individual success of thousands of Florida citizens. The new Tech-Prep programs are only one example of this. None of these programs take the place of the Associate of Arts students who are planning to enter one of the professions. The solid programs that they have completed in our colleges have prepared them for the rigors of baccalaureate programs in the Florida SUS and in universities all over the country. It is essential that the Boards understand and support all of the programs that are appropriate for your individual communities. Recent legislative sessions have, in my opinion, over stepped the appropriate dividing line between state policy-making and institutional decision-making when they began specifying the numbers of credit hours in general education and those required for graduation. Legislatures have done this before so it is not new; however, these are matters that Boards of Trustees should decide in the operation of their college based upon the recommendations of their own staffs and sensitive to the needs of their own community.

To paraphrase a familiar verse in the New Testament, all of these commitments have been important in the development of Florida's community colleges, but the **greatest and most important one, in my opinion, is the commitment to local control and local policy-making for the community college.** The only time the state should override local policy-making is when the local Boards do not act in a responsible manner. If you provide the attention that is needed for planning, if you provide the analysis that is needed for accountability, if you provide the nurture that is required to serve the citizens of your communities, there is no need for outside agencies to step in and tell you what to do. Your quiet attention

to making the policy decisions for your own colleges means that the policy-makers and the implementers of those policies live close enough to talk with each other. In the SUNSHINE, of course.

BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES

The important responsibilities of a Board have been outlined in various publications by a number of persons. One of such publications is that developed by the Florida Division of Community Colleges in the Trustee Information Manual that points out that under Florida law a Board of Trustees is responsible for every aspect of the operation of the college. A Board is specifically responsible for developing both short range and long range planning for the college, for serving as the legal agent for the college, for developing rules and policies for the operation of the college, for evaluating the performance goals of the college, and for developing the budget of the college. The local Boards of Trustees have many decision-making responsibilities: the college budget, the employment of personnel, long range planning, the selection of the CEO, to name only a few. While all of these are important decisions, a most important one is the selection of the CEO. From that decision comes all of the other decisions. The "climate" of the community college will be reflected by this decision, the quality of the programs will be determined by this decision, the public image of the college itself will be based upon this decision..

Since the Board is usually made up of a variety of individuals who were selected to represent the community, there will be a real diversity of experience in making this type of a decision. Some will be accustomed to selecting personnel while others will have little or no experience in the employment of personnel. Some will have a clear understanding of qualities needed for leadership in an educational institution while others will want to incorporate "business principles" into this decision-making process. Some will want to "make the choice without interference" while others will rather be told what is "best". Throughout all of this many Board members may not find the process very enjoyable or entertaining.

Fortunately, most boards are not faced with this decision more than once during a member's tenure unless the board member is appointed over several terms. Even then Florida's community presidents have normally remained in their positions much longer than the national average which is around five years.

PRINCIPLES TO ASSIST BOARDS

It is still very worthwhile, however, to consider some important principles that will assist Boards in selecting a CEO for their colleges:

1. The primary consideration is to define what the institution needs may be and determine the leadership that may be appropriate when a new president is required.
2. A reasonable budget should be determined. The investment in a search is an investment in the future of the institution and an adequate expenditure at the time of the search will cost the college less over the long run.
3. Consultant help may be used but the Board should never relinquish control of the process.
4. A reasonable time frame should be established and followed, giving this process the highest priority.
5. There should be a clearly stated understanding of procedures and organization structure that will be used.
6. A process that assures a broad participation of those who are concerned is needed.
7. A process that assures requisite confidentiality should be established.
8. A process that assures timely, adequate and honest communication must be established from the beginning.
9. The basic principle for decision-making that should be followed in all the business activities of the Board must be followed: Decisions are always made by the Board acting as a operational body and never by individual members acting alone. This decision is not an exception to that rule.

These principles are not different from those which Boards usually should follow in their operational decision-making procedures but they are focused upon this important activity, the selection of the president. Since this selection provides a Board with an opportunity to examine the college in a way that is seldom afforded, the initial activity should be to examine critically and carefully the "needs" and the long range plans of the college. A fresh vision, a clarified mission, a renewal of energy, a reaffirmed perspective, the opportunity for all of these presents itself at this point. Word from the outgoing president about dreams that he or she was not able to complete may be a place to start. A report from the college research office, consultations with the various constituencies of the college community—faculty, students, other administrators, staff, community representatives, local employers—all of these should be examined with staff help and/or with assistance of an outside consultant. From these conclusions should come a definition of the person who may be needed to provide leadership at this time.

USING CONSULTANTS

There are for most Board members few opportunities to gain experience in the process of selecting a president. Most Board members feel ill-prepared for this important responsibility and the tendency to turn to an outside consultant group to "take over and tell us who we want" may be very strong. And there are a number of consultant groups who will do this--for a fee. These groups often have a

"stable" of applicants whom they know and whom they encourage to apply. These may include a number of outstanding potential presidents but the consultant group has a built-in empathy for these candidates that includes a tendency to push them over others that they may not know as well.

Rather than employ a consultant group to "conduct a search" for the Board, consideration may be given to employing a single or a pair of consultants who will assist the Board in defining the needs of the college, verbalizing the presidential qualifications desired, and recommending the procedures to be used , the time frame to be established, and the assistance required at each stage of the process, especially the day-to-day activities to be followed. The Board should never expect the consultant(s) to carry out the search and to present them with a short list of potential candidates. The Board needs to be knowledgeable of all those who are applying. If consultants are used, clearly stated agreements that define the consultant responsibilities should be developed before they are employed.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

The basic emphasis of these remarks has been to emphasize the responsibilities that will enhance and empower local decision-making actions of the local Boards of Trustees. A constant and continuing danger to the concept of local control is the view that local boards cannot do the job. When a member of the legislature or a state level administrator of one of the state agencies takes an action that interferes with the local decision-making , it is more often than not the result of inaction on the part of the Board of Trustees. The most important activity of the local boards after the selection of the president is the supervision of the planning activity. The imperative need for competent and adequate institutional research to be used as a basis for this planning cannot be overemphasized. The tendency to provide limited or inadequate support for this activity is not uncommon.

Boards need to provide both support and time for understanding the planning process. Then Boards need to make decisions that are based upon this research and upon the plans that have been approved. The requirement that boards set aside one or two days at least once a year for planning is certainly a minimum amount of time dedicated to this activity.

It is equally important that the local Boards maintain full, open, and continuous communication with the State Board of Community Colleges. In the community college organization of systems in some ten states, there are no local governing boards. This type of state control structure has been established by the legislatures of these states because they did not fully understand the need for the local control of a community college that is an essential part of the basic philosophy of institutions that are designed to serve the post-high school needs of a specific geographical area. As noted above, Florida's system has been based upon the recognition that local control and local orientation is an essential consideration. However, it is necessary because of the financial support structure as well as the recognition that the state is the agency in our government that is responsible for education. The state may delegate some of its

responsibilities to a local agent, such as, in this case, the local Board of Trustees. State level coordination of the community colleges rather than state operational control is the way that Florida fulfills these responsibilities. It is important that the Boards of Trustees recognize their state level connection to the State Board of Community Colleges.

The relationships that the Board members develop with the local representatives in the State Legislature and the Federal Congress are another important activity that will have a great effect upon the Board's autonomy. In fact, aggressive advocacy may be the most effective activity of the Board. Members of these two governmental bodies need to understand the mission of the college and the planning that goes into the accomplishment of that mission. No representative or senator (at state or national level) who serves the local district should be uninformed as to the effects of any proposed legislation upon the local college. This becomes particularly important when major changes in federal legislation are proposed that affect college students. Subsequent state legislation for implementation may also be of major importance to the students. Board members concerns in reference to the new Performance based incentives are also a case in point.

The rules and policies that affect the college personnel are another area that should receive the full attention of the board. The college faculty is the basis for quality of the college. The selection of faculty, the terms of employment, the procedures of evaluation, the bases for dismissal, the salary scales and approved fringe benefits, the provisions for faculty development—all of these are concerns of the Board expressed through a Board Policy that is carefully worked out. The college goals in terms of part-time faculty is one example of this type of concern. Equal attention should be given to the college staff—secretaries, maintenance personnel, security personnel, and others employed by the college.

A final concern that I want to point out today is the relationships that Board members need to establish with the local citizens and agencies. Since Florida's community college Boards are appointed at the state level rather than elected at a local level, they are free of the partisanship that sometimes accompanies the process of running for office. The college must serves a specific geographic area, however, and this includes county and city governments and local businesses, some of whom may have statewide or even national connections. In order to emphasize the local orientation of the college and the local autonomy of the Board, members should be well acquainted with local officials and with local business and industry, both current and in the potential future. These individuals need to understand the college mission and the potential ways that the college may serve them. While college faculty and staff are also active in this role, it is especially important that the local citizens know their board members relate with them.

SUMMARY

In order to maintain the desired autonomy of the Boards of Trustees of Florida Community Colleges, it is essential that the Board members understand and take active roles in

- THE SELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT
- THE PLANNING, BOTH SHORT RANGE AND LONG RANGE, OF THE COLLEGE MISSION AND IMPLEMENTATION THERE OF
- THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
- THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LEGISLATIVE BODIES, BOTH STATE AND NATIONAL
- PERSONNEL RULES AND POLICIES
- RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES